

15th International Roundtable on Business Survey Frames
Washington, D.C. – October 22 – 26, 2001
Session No 6 Paper No 6 Sven Egmosé, Statistics Denmark
Effective Use of Tax and Administrative Data.

The session was introduced by the convener, who pointed to the political pressure to increase the use of administrative data for statistics. The reason for this pressure is the growing concern about the response burden. However, two preconditions for building the statistical programme on administrative data are that effective administrative systems exist in the country, and that the statistical institute has access to the individual administrative data.

If these preconditions are met, a range of advantages in using administrative data for updating the statistical business register and for compiling business statistics can be enumerated. Among the advantages are: Low response burden, high coverage, and reduced costs within the statistical institute.

But some drawbacks also exist. The units used for the administrative data might not correspond to the unit types the statisticians want to use for the statistics. The variables contained in the administrative system might not be exactly identical to the variables the statistician wants to describe by his statistics. And the time periods covered by the administrative systems might not correspond to the time periods wanted for the statistics.

The statisticians have to be aware on both the advantages and the drawbacks, and try to overcome the drawbacks when using administrative data.

For this session four papers were available. The authors presented three of the papers, but in the absence of Ms. Julia Cravo the convener briefly presented the Portuguese paper.

Abstracts of the four papers are available.

The presentation of each paper was followed by a discussion of the paper, and a more general discussion concluded the session.

During the very engaged discussions a lot a topics were mentioned.

One of the main topics was the problem concerning the unit type used. In the German paper the specific unit type 'Organschaft' was discussed intensively. Many other countries that are heavily users of administrative data for statistics declared that the same kind of unit type existed in their countries. It was argued that this unit type might be a good starting point when trying to determine complex enterprises or enterprise groups. This discussion was concluded by emphasising that inequality between the administrative unit types and the statistical unit types are some of the most important difficulties to handle, and it was proposed to elaborate more on this topic at Roundtables to come.

Another point raised was the possibility to combine data from administrative sources and survey data. If this is possible the response burden posed on the respondents will be lower. In some cases this is a possibility, but sometimes this is not just like that possible. The reasons for this not being a possibility might be some restrictions laid down on the use of administrative data. E.g. for the US agriculture statistics there are some restrictions on the use of the tax data received by the NASS. These restrictions means that the NASS is allowed to use the tax data for building the frame for their surveys, but the NASS is not allowed to load the tax data into the NASS files. Despite the limitations on the use, the tax data are very important to NASS to be able to make a complete file for the surveys.

The French paper concentrated on the use of administrative data for structural business statistics. In connection to this it was asked if administrative data was also used for short time statistics. The

answer was that administrative data was used for a few short-term statistics in France, and the same was the case in other countries. The reason for the small number of short-term statistics based on administrative data is maybe that it in many cases takes rather a long time before the administrative data are available for the statistics. For structural business statistics the time lag is not that important.

The conclusion of the session was that the topic of using administrative data for statistics was a very important one, and probably the importance of the topic will grow in the years to come. It was therefore argued that this topic should be discussed at Roundtables to come, and some new aspects to take up were mentioned. How to use administrative data to evaluate the quality of survey data and vice versa was mentioned as one of the new aspect to discuss. As a very convincing argument for this aspect was said that the statisticians are of course not exempted from the responsibility for the output whether the input for the statistics are surveys or administrative data.